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ABSTRACT

What is career counseling? With the development of professional standards and guidelines and the ever changing definition of counseling, now is the time to re-examine career counseling. The term career counseling encompasses many different types of work, from personal therapy to job search coaching. This discussion will examine the continuum known as career counseling, focusing on the different definitions, the links between career counseling and counseling, and the opportunities for a counseling focused approach. Practical strategies for integrating basic counseling skills into daily work will be discussed. (Contains 10 references.) (Author)

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# Counselling: Fit It Into Your Career

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What is career counselling? This discussion follows my exploration of the integration of personal and career counselling, focusing on the different definitions, the links between career counselling and counselling, and the opportunities for a counselling focused approach. The goal of this discussion is to stress the importance of counselling in career counselling. The focus will be on reintroducing strategies for incorporating counselling techniques into daily practice, keeping in mind an individual's skills, education, experience, and current career/position.

## Definitions

In beginning this exploration, it was immediately clear that even defining career counselling would present a challenge. Drawing on provincial and national professional associations, I began with the following definitions of career counselling.

- Counsellor: A professional whose practice involves the primary function of informing, advising, guiding, educating, and coaching. The practice of counselling includes, but is not limited to, clinical mental health counselling, and incorporates in its mandate, guidance and education to individuals, families and/or groups (Ontario Association of Consultants, Counsellors, Psychometrists and Psychotherapists (OCAPP), 2000).
- Counsellor: An individual with special training who advices and assists students, employees, disabled persons and substance abusers (Canadian Standards and Guidelines, 2001).
- Career Development Practitioner: Facilitates the ability of clients to take charge of their own career development by assisting them in the process of planning, managing and identifying resources for their career-life (Canadian Standards and Guidelines, 2001).
- Career Counselling – An interpersonal process focused on facilitating career development that involves choosing, entering, adjusting to, and advancing in a career and integrating the work role with other life roles. The process seeks to enhance personal development, as well as facilitate personal awareness about occupations, life/career decision-making, career planning, career pathing, or other career development related issues (Canadian Standards and Guidelines, 2001).

The goal of career counseling is to facilitate learning skills, interests, beliefs, values, work habits, and personal qualities that enable clients to create satisfying lives within a constantly changing work environment. The task of career counselors is to promote client learning. Thus, career counselors can be seen as coaches, educators, and mentors – not simply matchmakers (Krumboltz, 1996). Often Career Counselling is used to describe all work in the career field. There are many other important aspects including: information giving, creating resources, skill training in the job finding, resume writing, interpersonal, transition and career management skills. All components are important. When this diversity is recognized in policy the field is respected (Connect Symposium, 2001).

Some of the common themes between these definitions include an emphasis on informing, educating, advising, and facilitating. The career related definitions have a focus on career development, rather than mental health issues. There is clearly a continuum for what we define as career counselling. I would encourage readers to consider their own situation and from there determine a definition that is both appropriate and effective. Understanding your role as a career counsellor will assist you in determining what type of counselling strategies will fit with your current approach.

## New Developments in the Career Field

Traditional career planning was a three-step process that involved knowing yourself, knowing the market and then making an informed decision (Parsons, 1909). The ideas behind this three-step process are valid, but their simplicity has led people to believe it is an easy, linear process. In the last decade there has been a shift towards an holistic approach to career counselling. The remainder of this discussion will focus on holistic approaches, specifically the work of John Krumboltz, Norm Amundson, and Richard Chope.

Krumboltz's (1996) early work centered on the Social Learning Theory of Career Development that describes how an individual's learning experiences combine to shape their career path. More recently he has focused on counsellor interventions and strategies. It is Krumboltz's focus on integrating career theory and practice that is relevant for this discussion. He incorporates career activities into the counselling process drawing from both career development and counselling theory. He encourages counsellors to focus more on the process of learning. More recently,



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Krumboltz's (1999) has looked at the concept of planned happenstance and the idea that even events we define as chance, more than likely have some level of planning. The goal of planned happenstance theory is to assist clients to generate, recognize, and incorporate chance events into their career development. This perspective reframes indecision into open mindedness and sees counsellors as educators, instead of matchmakers.

Amundson(1998) feels that people engage in career counselling when they are stuck and for this reason he strongly supports the idea of using creativity and imagination in a counselling approach. He sees the relationship as critical, focusing on being genuine, having positive regard and empathy, and being flexible. Amundson stresses that if a client comes to your office feeling stuck, then you should focus on moving forward. This does not simply mean focusing on a task or strategy, rather focusing on the process itself. As career counsellors, we are often seen, both by our clients and ourselves, as problem solvers. As a counsellor, that is not necessarily our primary role. It is important to remember the process and not just to look for a solution.

Chope's(2000) work deals with the emotional experiences that often accompany career transition. Similar to Krumboltz, he bridges the theory to practice gap by providing interventions for counsellors that are based on counselling methods. Chope's work is refreshing as it asks individuals to stop and think about their emotional reaction and the other forces that may be affecting their career transition. The lack of emphasis on the emotions associated with transition may lead both client and counsellor to perceive this change as simplistic and rational. Incorporating the emotional component may facilitate an individual to move more smoothly through transition, as it allows them to recognize and work to accept their emotional reactions. Krumboltz, Amundson, and Chope challenge us to examine and incorporate different perspectives into our approach.

## Strategies

The remainder of this discussion will focus on strategies and perspectives to assist in integrating counselling into the practice of career counselling. These ideas have been drawn from the work mentioned above and my own experience.

### Appointment Set Up

Amundson discusses the idea of changing the set up of the counselling appointment. He suggests varying the length of the session, including children, going for a walk, or taking a break during the session. I have started to incorporate a distinct split between the counselling and information giving components in the session. The amount of time spent in counsellor mode will depend on the individual client, but I make ever effort to wait until the end of the session to become the information giver.

### Role Clarification

An important first step in any counselling relation is to clarify roles and the goals of the session(s). I begin my sessions by asking clients what their main concern is or how I can help them today in order to clarify their expectations. I see my role as educating and providing them with information on the process of career pathing, which may include career, academic, and employment concerns. Once they have begun the journey my role is to support them through the process, both as a counsellor and provider of information. I have an open discussion in the first session as this allows the client the opportunity to define their own role and begin to understand the process.

### Basic Counselling Skills

One of the first clients I worked with was a psychology graduate with a strong research background. whowas interested in working as a counsellor. It wasn't until she began job searching that she realized that her skill set was not a good match for the type of work she was seeking. By the time she came to see me she was very upset and had very little confidence in her abilities. Where she had once excelled, she was now struggling and overwhelmed. It would be difficult for us to continue with the typical career planning exercises until she had dealt with her emotions. We spent a lot of time just talking about how things were different in her life and did very little career planning and job search work. I saw her about five times over the course of 2 months. One day she simply phoned to tell me she had found work as an intake counsellor and didn't need to come in anymore. At first I was surprised. I felt like I



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had not provided her with any strategies for finding work. I then realized that it was not the strategies that she needed but rather the emotional support. She knew how to look for work once she was ready to. This experience was extremely useful for me. As a new career counsellor, I was quick to hang on to strategies and techniques and this experience reinforced the importance of the relationship and having a counselling focused approach.

## Focusing on the Process

Paying attention to what is happening in the session is another way to maintain a counselling focused approach. I may be working with a client who starts by detailing all the different questions they have and all the information they need. Rather then jumping in with an answer, I will instead comment on the large number of questions they have. For example, "Whew, it seems like right now you are on a search for information" or depending on how they express the questions, "This many questions seems overwhelming. Does it to you?" Another way to focus on the process is to be aware of the emotions or physical reactions that are being expressed during the session. For example, "When we started to talk about all of your options I noticed that you made a grimace" or "When you were talking about dropping the chemistry class, you smiled. Why was that?" Taking the time to both recognize and then explore the client's physical or emotional reaction may help them stay focused on the here and now and really do some deep exploration into their career concerns.

## Recognize and Validate Emotions

Similar to having a focus on the process, recognizing emotions may simply mean reflecting back the emotion so the client is aware that they are expressing it. This also allows the counsellor the opportunity to clarify that they have properly interpreted the situation. It is also important to normalize the emotion, by reassuring the individual that there is no common reaction and that whatever they are experiencing is all right. Chope (2000) outlines some exercises to assist clients in dealing with these emotional responses.

### Self doubt

Encouraging clients to list their significant accomplishments will serve two purposes: identifying skills and increasing confidence. Assist clients to remember encouraging messages including the person who expressed the message, their age, and the impact then and now. These types of discussions will help clients see a different perspective.

### Anxiety

Encourage clients to list the fears they are encountering in their career pathing or job searching. What were their physical, mental, and behavioural reactions? Take time to document and evaluate these reactions, using strategies such as relaxation or positive self-talk.

### Mood monitoring

I may suggest this exercise if I am working with clients who are experiencing a lot of emotional reactions about their career. It serves the purpose of helping clients become aware of their emotions and how the emotions may be impeding their ability to move forward. We can also look at patterns and themes to see if there are certain activities or experiences that are causing them to feel a certain emotion. If the client ranks each day out of 10, we may discover that there is one activity that they consistently rank higher or lower. This would be a theme to explore further.

## Storytelling

Some clients naturally speak in stories or counsellors can encourage this. In reviewing the client's story we may work to identify themes and see how they relate to career pathing. In one instance a client began telling me about a summer job he had and the things he did not like about it. I let him complete the story uninterrupted and then I raised a few points that had seemed the most salient. He had described how he did not like being pulled away from one task to another and how he did not like to take direction when he felt there was another logical way to complete



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the task. We began discussing these themes in the broader context of his life and how they would relate to his future career pathing.

Storytelling does not have to be verbal. Journaling and writing are also great ways to have clients tell their story. The focus may be on their day-to-day activities or I may encourage them to write about a dream career or fantasy career. Drawing from planned happenstance theory, you could encourage clients to look at the 'chance' events in their lives and consider the role that they played. In listening to the stories and the events, let them know that they are active agents and encourage them to transform curiosity into opportunity and to identify opportunities. In this way you are teaching clients to produce desirable chance events (Krumboltz, 1999).

## Career Pathing as Transition

Assisting clients to explore examples of transition may facilitate the understanding of a current transition. This can be accomplished through discussion or by having clients complete a written assignment. The focus may be on the client or on significant people in their life. For example, you could have clients list the transitions throughout their life, including transitions in the family and parents' lives. Clients could then compare the transitions and reactions with their own, looking for similarities and differences (Bridges, 1980). Another form of this exercise would be to have the client complete a genogram, focusing on transition or career transition. This could help the client identify patterns and expectations (Chope, 2000). Encourage the client to identify who will be affected by the transition. This exercise may assist in looking at the context of the decision and the different influences being experienced.

## Role Playing/Modeling

When clients are completing research, I often use role playing or modeling to help them understand what they need to be doing to move forward. This may occur around trying to find information both print/on-line or in-person interviews. If they have several things they are looking for, I will choose one and walk them through the process of finding the information. I reemphasize the fact that I am an expert on the process of finding things out, but that I do not necessarily have the information. I will also encourage them to let me know anything they find out. This helps to reinforce the idea that they can be proactive and are an active agent in the process. Another time I use role-playing is when rehearsing for networking and informational interviews.

(L2) Evaluating options

Making choices is often the most difficult time for a client. This is the time when it's really important to assess whether enough time has been spent in self-exploration and career research. There can be a distinct difference between undecided and indecisive. It will be important for the counsellor to assess the situation and work with the client in an appropriate manner. Undecided my simply require further information whereas indecisive may entail further counselling to explore the history of decision-making. Amundson has several good exercises:

<u>Significant others</u>

Encourage clients to consider the perspective of significant others in their life. You could role-play in the session to allow them to consider the other perspectives. The different role-playing could include the two sides of the decision, or two significant people with different perspectives.

<u>Immediate decision</u>

Clients needs to consider the immediate decision rather than a series of decisions. The first step is being able to break it down and identify the first decision.

<u>Visualize the future</u>

Encourage clients to imagine it is the future and they have taken one course of action. How do they feel about the decision they made? How do others feel? How has it affected their life? You can have them complete this exercise with all of the options that they are considering.

## Conclusion

Working to integrate my career development and counselling knowledge has provided me with the opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding of both. In reviewing the traditional career planning model, new developments, and my own personal experiences, I have been able to expand my career counselling skills and my appreciation for the profession. If you take anything away from this discussion I hope it is a greater appreciation for the complexity of career counselling, some insights into your role, and some ideas that you can incorporate into your daily work that will hopefully make it more effective for your clients and more enjoyable for you.

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